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Jeff Ottesen, Chief Statewide. Planning
State of Alaska
Dept. of Transportation
3132 Channel Drive
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Mr. Ottesen:

We would like to submit this letter in support of a bridge to link South Naknek with Naknek and King Salmon. We believe that a bridge would be very beneficial to so many people, both in regards to safety issues and financial ones.

Currently students from 6th grade to 12th grade fly to school each day. Bad weather is a common occurrence in this area, and flying everyday puts our children at risk of a disastrous accident. Flying also causes them to miss many days of school if planes cannot fly due to weather. During the winter, students do not arrive to school until second hour because of a lack of daylight needed for flying. Also, it makes it very difficult for our children to participate in after school activities. During most of the school year our children have to stay across the river with friends or relatives if they wish to participate in these activities. We, like most parents, would like to be able to have our children home every night, especially on school nights.

If a bridge were built, students and parents alike would also have access to more and better educational, social and cultural events and facilities. These types of facilities/activities include: continuing education classes offered through the University, Community Education programs, better equipped libraries, churches, improved access to the Borough public meetings and offices, court system, and other governmental agencies, access to Camai Medical Center, easier access to stores, fuel vendors, restaurants and other businesses, access to the swimming pool, and easier, less expensive access to national parks and wildlife refuges.

As mentioned above, bad weather is often a problem here. In the event of medical emergencies, having a bridge available to transport ill or injured persons could literally be a life-saving tool. It would also allow the Borough to centralize its emergency systems and personnel.

Other reasons for building a bridge are financial ones. Freight and travel costs would decrease for both individuals and businesses in South Naknek. Even getting groceries from the stores in Naknek or King Salmon would be cheaper if we did not have to pay to have them sent over. During the summer months additional commercial markets would be available to service the South Naknek fishermen. Individuals could purchase fuel and have it delivered directly to their homes from north side vendors. (Currently there are no South Naknek vendors able to deliver fuel right to people's homes.) Having a bridge could also provide more buyers of South Naknek beach fall fish. Other services could become available too, like the accessing of cable television and garbage pick-up. As you can see, the financial reasoning for a bridge benefits not only the South Naknek residents, but also would increase support of north side businesses.

One other major financial benefit that South Naknek residents would derive from a bridge would be access to jobs. Currently, a fairly high rate of unemployment exists in South Naknek during the winter months because of the few jobs available here. A bridge would allow people to apply for jobs in Naknek and King Salmon that currently are not economically feasible due to the cost of daily air travel.

The argument has been made that the subsistence lifestyle of South Naknek residents might be threatened if this area was opened up to additional users (i.e. Naknek and King Salmon residents). A counter argument would be that if South Naknek is opened up to additional users, so are Naknek and King Salmon. South Naknek residents would have access to caribou after the herd crosses to the north side. They would also have access to the Mulchatna herd. No permit is currently required to hunt this herd. Additional picking sites would be accessible, and lake fishing would be made much easier. The overall subsistence use in the three connected communities would not change.

The argument has also been made that the Borough might not be able to raise its share of the expense of a bridge. When you consider the fact that currently so many of the Borough services have to be duplicated, you have to wonder if this argument is a valid one. If a bridge were built, educational facilities could be centralized. As mentioned earlier, emergency programs could also be centralized. The three communities could be serviced by one landfill. Travel, freight, equipment and maintenance costs incurred by the Borough would be decreased because of this centralization. These savings would pay for the Borough's portion of the bridge cost in a very short time.

This decrease in expenses would also apply to north side businesses which have an interest in South Naknek. For instance Naknek Electric Association and the Bristol Bay Telephone Co-Op would find it easier and less expensive to provide their services in South Naknek.

South Naknek will change with the construction of a bridge. We are not denying that, and some of the changes may well be negative ones. However, the advantages of a bridge definitely outweigh any negative aspects. The benefits derived from a bridge will allow this community to progress educationally and financially, while also making it a safer, more enjoyable place to live. We believe it is time to join the three communities in our Borough with a bridge.

Sincerely,



Laura Zimin and Rochelle Zimin

CC: Bristol Bay Borough Assembly
South Naknek Village Council
Bristol Bay Native Association
Governor's Office